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EXCERPTED

Leslie Stahl commentator

Bob Kupperman, terrorist expert at Georgetown University

STAHL: And they did get that call on September 8th warning that something like this was going to happen. KUPPERMAN: Well, the other thing is that, in all fairness to the administration, one of the characteristics of the intelligence business, despite its, its flaunted machismo and success, is that the false-alarm rate is enormously high.

STAHL: So you get that, that sense of numbness you were talking about before.
KUPPERMAN: Yes, I think that's correct.

STAHL: And, and you think that's what we were in, that it had been October, and we just wanted to sort of sleep over this. KUPPERMAN: Well, I remember one...will remain nameless...one very senior administration official mentioned to me the other day just before the incident, 'Heck, the Olympics has passed without incident; terrorisms don't.'

STAHL: A top official said that. KUPPERMAN: Yes, uh...

STAHL: Even though we had these phone calls and the warnings. KUPPERMAN: Well, well, we get them, we get a lot of such things, everything from kooks to potentially very serious ones. And many of these organizations...you've gotta understand, the Shiites, it's not all one fixed, grand conspiracy that we all like to think. There are many such cells and yes, there may be common training sources and common religious and cultural inclinations, but there's a difference. Some of them act fairly autonomously, and most, if not all of them, are really not penetrated. It's not like the old days with the Palestinians. It's not like the older days with the KKK, where half the people sitting there were the FBI.

STAHL: Let me ask you about preemptive strikes. Are these possible? Do we know enough about who they are in any place? KUPPERMAN: If we don't mind killing a lot of the wrong people, sure. I think the point is that if we bungle it, and it appears to be that we've bungled it really badly, and we get the wrong people, and maybe even worse, some of our people get caught hanged in Syria, Iran or wherever, we're gonna find ourselves in a curious problem. Not only is there the risk of escalation to actual military confrontation, there's the other side of it. These people may with some degree of justice, particularly the ones who had nothin' to do with hurting us, side through their own self-structure within the U.S. which exists, go on the attack here. And then we're gonna have an excuse for unbridled intelligence collection again in the U.S.

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